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DEPT FOR G/IWI, Andrea Bottner

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KWMN PLUM PREL KPAO FJ

SUBJECT: EMBASSY SUVA NOMINATION FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE
AWARD - FIJI

REF: STATE 126072

¶1. Embassy Suva is pleased and proud to nominate Ms. Virisila Buadromo, Executive Director of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement for the Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award. Ms. Buadromo has been notified of her nomination.

¶2. Ms. Buadromo's particulars are as follows:

Virisila Buadromo
Executive Director, Fiji Women's Rights Movement
DOB: November 9, 1971

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Fiji Women's Rights Movement
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¶3. Justification: Virisila Buadromo has been a strong advocate for women's and human rights since 2001, when she was appointed Executive Director of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM). Having endured detention and abuse at the hands of Fiji's military-backed government for her vocal opposition to the December 2006 coup, Ms. Buadromo nevertheless continues her efforts to advance women's rights, human rights, and democracy in Fiji. FWRM has been at the forefront of the women's movement in Fiji for more than 20 years, advocating and lobbying for gender equality and legal and policy reform. Following the December 2006 coup, Ms. Buadromo and the FWRM became outspoken critics of the coup and military-installed government.

As a result of this pro-democracy advocacy, Ms. Buadromo was seized by soldiers from her home in the middle of the night on December 24, 2006 and taken to a military barracks. Five other coup opponents were taken with her. Over the course of the night and into Christmas morning, the group was physically beaten, verbally abused, threatened, and humiliated - stepped on, made to lay and crawl on the wet pavement, and lick soldiers' boots - before being forced to run several miles in the rain through Suva, followed by soldiers in vehicles. The Interim Government imposed a travel ban on the activists, preventing them from leaving the country, which was maintained for two months.

Ms. Buadromo's efforts on behalf of women's, civil and human rights have not flagged, despite this abuse and intimidation. As chairperson of the Fiji NGO Coalition on Human Rights, her involvement in these issues has, if anything, grown.

The 2006 coup, and Fiji's post-coup environment, has posed unique challenges for FWRM. Traditionally, the organization focused its energies on lobbying Fiji's parliament and the Fiji Government. In the post coup environment this is no longer an option because there is no parliament to lobby and engaging the Interim Government would compromise the organization's stated position that the government is illegal.

In this environment, FWRM has re-energized its community based efforts, and two are particularly worth mentioning. One is the Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF), a year-long training program for young women, covering a wide variety of important topics, from the environment and sustainable development to feminism and public speaking. The 2007 program particularly emphasizes democracy and human rights. Critical to the development of future women leaders, the ELF provides a safe forum for young women to debate and explore their thoughts and ideas about the current political situation in Fiji. Another key program is FWRM's outreach efforts targeted at raising awareness of Fiji's family law and the Family Law Court. Advertising with pamphlets in English, Hindi and Fijian, and in the future on TV as well, FWRM is working to inform and educate Fiji's most vulnerable citizens about their rights and ability to access justice.

Ms. Buadromo has a long history of activism and advocacy on behalf of these important issues in Fiji. That she continues to advocate democratic and human rights issues, despite continuing and very real danger, is a testament both to her commitment and the importance of her work in Fiji.

¶4. Emboffs following women's issues at post:

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